RTT-ELC Phase 2 Project Abstract

New Mexico:

Applicant: Office of the Governor, State of New Mexico
Lead Agency: New Mexico Public Education Department
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Amount Requested: $25,000,000

New Mexico's Phase II Race to the Top/Early Learning Challenge Fund (RTT) application will allow expansion of the State's current activities to develop and support a coordinated system of early learning and development. These are designed to ensure that many more children from birth to age five have access to dramatically improved early learning programs, and that they enter school with the skills, knowledge and dispositions they need to be successful.

New Mexico's proposal has four primary goals. All four goals are based on the commitment to the creation of an early care, health and education "system of systems" that transforms disconnected, siloed programs that historically have labeled and segregated children because of categorical funding streams into a coordinated system that focuses on the building of high-quality, comprehensive, community-specific programs with a continuum of integrated services.

New Mexico has chosen, as its overarching vision, the goal established by its Early Learning Advisory Council: *Every child in New Mexico will have an equal opportunity for success in school based upon equitable access to an aligned and high quality early learning system*. This vision will guide the State's activities over the next four years.

The four goals that constitute New Mexico's Reform Agenda are:

1) Implement *FOCUS*, New Mexico's newly revised Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System to:
- Focus on children's learning through the implementation of New Mexico's authentic observation –documentation – and curriculum planning process based upon the *New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines: Birth through Kindergarten*;
- Establish common Program Standards across all publicly funded Early Learning and Development Programs that include child and program assessment, curriculum planning, Early Childhood Educator qualifications, health promotion practices and family engagement; and
- Utilize a common Comprehensive Assessment System as the basis for continuous quality improvement in all Early Learning and Development Programs including Child Care, Home Visiting, Head Start, Early Head Start, New Mexico PreK, Early Intervention (FIT) and Early Childhood Special Education.

2) Use the kindergarten rubrics in the *New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines: Birth through Kindergarten* as the criteria for a Kindergarten Readiness Assessment to be used in all New Mexico public schools. This authentic assessment process will not only provide policy-makers with important data regarding the effectiveness of early learning programs, but most importantly will provide kindergarten teachers with critical information regarding children's learning that can be used to inform curriculum planning and differentiated instruction.

3) Establish Early Childhood Investment Zones by identifying and prioritizing communities where: children are at greatest risk (based on aggregated socio-ecological risk indicators); and the community demonstrates the greatest will and capacity for creating a continuum of high-quality early learning programs. New Mexico's goal is for these "ready communities" to model the establishment of community-specific capacity building, infrastructure development and comprehensive integrated early childhood care, health and education services for other communities as the state strives to make high quality early learning opportunities universally available to all those who wish to participate.

4) Build a unified early learning data system that will provide educators, families and policy-makers with the information to:
- Provide the most current information educators need to nurture and teach the children in their programs;
- Provide families with the information they need in order to make informed choices about which programs are best for their young children;
- Track young children's development and progress as they are increasingly ready for school;
- Measure the quality of and improvement in all of New Mexico's early learning and development programs;
- Assess the status of young children as they enter kindergarten; and
- Follow students from their earliest enrollment in early childhood programs through entrance into kindergarten, elementary, middle and high school, higher education and the workforce.

New Mexico's plan is based on the commitment to create an early care, health and education "system of systems" that transforms disconnected, siloed programs that historically have labeled and segregated children because of categorical funding streams into a coordinated system. The system focuses on the building of high quality, comprehensive, community-specific programs with a continuum of integrated services. This plan is based on the belief that community programs are able to work together when provided with a common focus – ensuring that every child has equitable access to appropriate services and supports that acknowledge their uniqueness and enable them to reach their full potential.